From Sykes-Picot to the Wolfowitz Doctrine: The Colonial Legacy and Modern Middle Eastern Turmoil

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The modern Middle East has been profoundly shaped by a series of external interventions, driven by colonial ambitions and geopolitical strategies. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the Wolfowitz Doctrine of the post-Cold War era stand as two critical inflection points in this history. Sykes-Picot, a secret pact between Britain and France, carved the Ottoman Empire's territories into artificial states, disregarding the region's complex ethnic, religious, and tribal diversity. These borders, drawn to serve imperial interests, laid the foundation for fragile states and persistent conflict. Nearly a century later, the Wolfowitz Doctrine sought to maintain U.S. unipolar dominance through regime change and military intervention, further destabilizing an already volatile region. Together, these episodes reflect a shared disregard for local agency and the long-term consequences of imposing external agendas. This paper examines the enduring impacts of these strategies, highlighting their role in shaping the Middle East's ongoing turmoil and exploring lessons for more ethical and inclusive approaches to international relations.

Keywords: Sykes-Picot Agreement, Wolfowitz Doctrine, Middle East history, colonial legacy, artificial borders, geopolitical instability, regime change, U.S. foreign policy, British imperialism, French imperialism, sectarian conflict, ethnic divisions, Middle Eastern turmoil, global dominance, modern interventions, regional sovereignty, international relations. 47 pages.

1. Introduction

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 stands as one of the most consequential and controversial moments in modern Middle Eastern history. Signed in secrecy during World War I by British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot, the agreement aimed to divide the Ottoman Empire's Middle Eastern territories into British and French spheres of influence. This arrangement, brokered while the Ottoman Empire was teetering on collapse, not only reflected the imperial ambitions of Britain and France but also foreshadowed the reshaping of the region without regard for the desires or identities of its inhabitants. When revealed in 1917 by the Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution, the agreement provoked outrage in the Arab world, as it contradicted earlier promises made to Arab leaders about post-war independence in exchange for their revolt against the Ottomans.

The significance of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in shaping the modern Middle East cannot be overstated. The arbitrary borders it created—dividing the region into zones of direct and indirect European control—ignored the complex ethnic, tribal, and religious fabric of the region. These borders placed disparate groups within single political entities, while simultaneously dividing historically cohesive communities. For example, Iraq, carved from three Ottoman provinces, forced Shi’a Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds into a single state with weak internal cohesion. Similarly, Syria was cobbled together from diverse populations, including Sunnis, Alawites, Druze, and Christians, under a framework that served colonial interests rather than local needs. These artificial borders created deep-rooted tensions that have contributed to decades of conflict and instability.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, while emblematic of colonial ambition, also represents the beginning of a pattern of external interference in the Middle East that persists to this day. Just as Sykes-Picot disregarded the socio-political realities of the region in favor of strategic convenience, modern geopolitical strategies, such as the Wolfowitz Doctrine, have continued to prioritize external powers' interests over the stability and sovereignty of the Middle East. The Wolfowitz Doctrine, formulated in the aftermath of the Cold War, sought to reshape the region through regime change and military interventions, echoing the disregard for local agency seen in Sykes-Picot. This continuity between colonial-era

agreements and modern strategies highlights the enduring legacy of foreign powers treating the Middle East as a geopolitical chessboard, often to devastating effect.

This paper argues that the Sykes-Picot Agreement, in prioritizing colonial interests over the ethnic, religious, and political unity of the Middle East, set the stage for enduring instability in the region. This instability has been exacerbated by contemporary strategies, such as the Wolfowitz Doctrine, which have perpetuated the same pattern of external domination and disregard for local complexities. By examining the historical context, terms, and consequences of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, as well as drawing parallels to modern interventions, this paper seeks to illuminate the enduring impacts of foreign interference in the Middle East and the lessons it offers for future geopolitical strategies.

2. Historical Context of the Sykes-Picot Agreement

The Sykes-Picot Agreement emerged during a period of profound geopolitical upheaval, as the Ottoman Empire, long referred to as the "sick man of Europe," faced disintegration amidst the chaos of World War I. At the time, the Ottoman Empire still controlled vast territories in the Middle East, encompassing much of modern-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and parts of Saudi Arabia and Turkey. As the Ottomans aligned with the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary), their territory became a prime target for the Allied Powers, who sought to carve up the region to secure their own strategic and imperial ambitions.

The Geopolitical Landscape of the Ottoman Empire During World War I

The Ottoman Empire, although weakened by decades of internal strife and external pressures, retained strategic importance due to its location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Its Middle Eastern territories included vital trade routes, resources like oil (particularly in Mesopotamia), and religiously significant sites such as Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina. The war presented the Allied Powers with an opportunity to dismantle the Ottoman Empire and seize control of these valuable regions. However, the region's complex mosaic of ethnicities, religions, and tribes posed significant challenges to any plans for post-war governance.

The Motivations of Britain and France in Dividing Ottoman Territories

Britain and France, as the leading colonial powers of the time, approached the division of Ottoman territories with clear imperial goals:

- **British Objectives**:
    - Control over Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) was crucial for securing access to oil, which was increasingly vital for modern warfare and industrialization.
    - Maintaining a land route to India, the crown jewel of the British Empire, required control over regions such as Transjordan and Palestine.
    - Securing dominance over the Persian Gulf and ensuring a buffer against Russian expansion into the region were additional priorities.
- **French Objectives**:
    - France sought to reassert its historical ties to the Levant, particularly in modern-day Syria and Lebanon, where significant Christian communities (e.g., Maronites) had cultural and political connections to France.
    - Economic interests included securing control over trade routes and agricultural resources in the region.
    - Establishing influence in the eastern Mediterranean aligned with France's broader strategy of expanding its colonial empire in North Africa and the Middle East.

The Role of Other Powers in Shaping the Agreement

Although the Sykes-Picot Agreement primarily reflected British and French ambitions, other powers played important roles in shaping its provisions:

- **Russia**:
    - Initially part of the negotiations, Tsarist Russia sought to expand its influence in eastern Anatolia and gain control over Constantinople

(modern Istanbul) and the Turkish Straits. These ambitions were tied to Russia's longstanding goal of accessing warm-water ports.

  - Russia's involvement ended with the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which led to the public disclosure of the agreement.

- **Italy**:
  - Italy's interests were marginal but focused on potential territorial gains in the southern Mediterranean, particularly Libya and parts of Anatolia.
  - Italy later became a party to the agreement through the Treaty of London (1915) and other subsequent negotiations.

The Secret Nature of the Agreement and Its Public Revelation

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was negotiated in secret between Britain and France in 1916, reflecting the colonial powers' desire to avoid scrutiny or opposition from other actors. The secrecy was particularly significant because Britain had simultaneously engaged in conflicting negotiations with other parties:

1. **Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (1915-1916)**:
   - Britain had promised Arab leaders, including Sharif Hussein of Mecca, independence for Arab lands in exchange for their revolt against Ottoman rule. The Sykes-Picot Agreement directly contradicted these promises by dividing the region into British and French zones of control.
2. **Balfour Declaration (1917)**:
   - The British commitment to establishing a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine further complicated the region's future.

The secret nature of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was exposed by the Bolsheviks following the Russian Revolution in 1917. The newly established Soviet government released the full text of the agreement, provoking outrage in the Arab world. Arab leaders, who had been led to believe that their support for the Allied war effort would result in independence, viewed the agreement as a

betrayal. The revelation also deepened mistrust of Western powers, a sentiment that continues to influence the region's geopolitics.

Conclusion

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was born out of the competing imperial ambitions of Britain and France, shaped by the broader interests of other powers like Russia and Italy, and steeped in duplicity and secrecy. Its provisions disregarded the aspirations of local populations, prioritizing colonial control over the realities of ethnic, religious, and tribal diversity. The eventual public revelation of the agreement not only exposed the duplicity of Western powers but also sowed the seeds of mistrust and resentment that would define the Middle East's relationship with the West for generations. Understanding the historical context of this agreement is essential to grasping its far-reaching consequences.

3. Terms of the Agreement

The Sykes-Picot Agreement, finalized in 1916, outlined the division of the Ottoman Empire's Middle Eastern territories into zones of British and French influence. These territorial divisions were based on strategic and imperial considerations rather than the ethnic, religious, or tribal realities of the region. The agreement also introduced the concept of an international zone in Palestine, reflecting the region's global religious significance. These terms would later overlap and conflict with other wartime agreements and declarations, leading to a legacy of mistrust and political instability.

3.1. British Zones of Influence

Under the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Britain was assigned control over key territories in the Middle East, including Iraq, Transjordan, and parts of Palestine:

- **Iraq (Mesopotamia)**:
    - Britain sought control over Iraq for its strategic and economic value. Mesopotamia's vast oil reserves were critical for Britain's industrial

and military needs, particularly as the modern world transitioned to oil-based energy.

  - Basra and Baghdad, key cities in Iraq, were essential for securing British dominance over the Persian Gulf and maintaining a buffer against Russian expansion in Persia.
  - The inclusion of predominantly Shi'a areas in the south and Kurdish regions in the north created a state with deep ethnic and sectarian divisions, setting the stage for future instability.

- **Transjordan**:
  - The territory east of the Jordan River was included in Britain's sphere of influence to ensure control over trade routes and maintain access to the Arabian Peninsula.
  - Transjordan was later established as a semi-autonomous entity under British mandate, serving as a buffer between British-controlled territories and other regional powers.
- **Palestine**:
  - Palestine was initially designated as part of Britain's sphere of influence under the agreement. However, its status became more complex due to its religious significance and the conflicting promises Britain made to various stakeholders.
  - The British commitment to establishing a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, formalized in the **Balfour Declaration of 1917**, would later cause tensions with the Arab population and neighboring states.

3.2. French Zones of Influence

France, historically invested in the Levant region due to its cultural and religious ties, was assigned control over Syria and Lebanon:

- **Syria**:
    - France sought to dominate Syria due to its strategic location and historical connections with the region. The French government had long maintained relationships with Christian communities, such as the Maronites, viewing them as potential allies in asserting colonial control.
    - The division of Syria into multiple administrative regions, including areas for Alawites and Druze, reflected a "divide and rule" strategy that deepened ethnic and religious fragmentation.
- **Lebanon**:
    - Lebanon, carved out of greater Syria, was envisioned as a primarily Christian state under French protection. The Maronite Christians in Lebanon had strong cultural and political ties to France, making this region a key part of France’s colonial ambitions.
    - However, the inclusion of significant Sunni and Shi’a Muslim populations within Lebanon created internal divisions that would persist for decades.

3.3. Creation of International Zones

One of the unique features of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was the designation of certain territories as international zones, particularly:

- **Palestine and Jerusalem**:
    - Recognizing the religious significance of Jerusalem to Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the agreement proposed that Palestine, including the holy city of Jerusalem, be placed under international administration.

- This arrangement was intended to prevent disputes between Britain and France while ensuring access for all major religious groups.
- The international zone idea underscored the difficulty of reconciling colonial ambitions with the region's complex religious and cultural dynamics.

3.4. Overlap with Other Agreements

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was not the only wartime negotiation concerning the Middle East. Its terms overlapped—and often conflicted—with other agreements and promises made during World War I:

- **Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (1915–1916)**:
  - In a series of letters between Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, and Sharif Hussein of Mecca, Britain promised Arab independence in exchange for their support in the war against the Ottomans.
  - These promises of independence directly contradicted the territorial divisions outlined in Sykes-Picot, leading to a sense of betrayal among Arab leaders when the agreement was revealed.
- **Balfour Declaration (1917)**:
  - In addition to the promises made to Arab leaders, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, committing to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This declaration, combined with the terms of Sykes-Picot, created a politically volatile situation in Palestine, with competing claims from Jews, Arabs, and the international community.
- **Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and Treaty of Lausanne (1923)**:
  - After the war, the Ottoman Empire formally dissolved, and the League of Nations mandates were established to implement the territorial arrangements outlined in Sykes-Picot.

- However, the borders were further adjusted through these treaties, particularly after the Turkish War of Independence, which redrew boundaries in Anatolia and northern Syria.

3.5. The Legacy of Sykes-Picot's Terms

The territorial divisions established by Sykes-Picot reflected the imperial priorities of Britain and France rather than the realities on the ground. By imposing artificial borders and ignoring the region's ethnic, religious, and tribal complexities, the agreement set the stage for future conflict and instability. Its overlap with other agreements further complicated the political landscape, creating competing claims and fostering deep mistrust of Western powers in the Arab world. These terms not only shaped the post-war Middle East but also left an enduring legacy of division and resentment that continues to influence the region today.

4. Impact on the Middle East

The Sykes-Picot Agreement profoundly reshaped the political and social landscape of the Middle East, creating a legacy of division, conflict, and weak national identities. Its disregard for the ethnic, tribal, and religious realities of the region, coupled with its imposition of artificial borders, has left a lasting impact that continues to influence the geopolitics of the Middle East.

4.1. Creation of Arbitrary Borders

One of the most immediate and significant consequences of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was the imposition of borders that ignored the ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity of the Middle East. These borders were drawn to serve the strategic interests of Britain and France, with little consideration for the people living within them.

- **Ignoring Ethnic, Tribal, and Religious Divisions**:
    - The Middle East has historically been a mosaic of ethnicities, tribes, and religions, including Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Assyrians, Armenians,

Jews, and various Christian and Muslim sects. These communities often had longstanding local governance systems and cultural cohesion that transcended the administrative boundaries imposed by the Ottoman Empire.

    - Sykes-Picot disregarded these existing structures, lumping together disparate groups with conflicting identities and aspirations into single political entities, while simultaneously dividing cohesive communities across new borders.

- **Examples of Fragmented States**:
    - **Iraq**:
        - Iraq was created by combining three distinct Ottoman provinces: Mosul (predominantly Kurdish), Baghdad (Sunni Arab), and Basra (Shi'a Arab). The resulting state included three major groups—Shi'a Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds—who had little historical or cultural unity.
        - This fragmentation has fueled decades of sectarian and ethnic tensions, including Kurdish demands for independence, Sunni-Shi'a power struggles, and intermittent violence.
    - **Syria**:
        - Syria was similarly fragmented, with its population comprising Sunni Arabs, Alawites, Druze, Christians, and other minorities. The French, seeking to secure their influence, divided Syria into smaller administrative regions, further fragmenting the population and fostering divisions that would later erupt into conflict.

By creating states with deeply divided populations, the Sykes-Picot Agreement laid the groundwork for political instability and recurring violence in the Middle East.

4.2. Legacy of Division and Conflict

The arbitrary borders and fragmented states created by Sykes-Picot have had long-term consequences, fueling internal divisions and regional conflicts that persist to this day.

- **Sectarian Tensions and Civil Wars**:
    - **Iraq**:
        - The imposition of Sunni Arab dominance during British rule, despite the Shi'a Arab majority, created deep resentment that erupted into violence after Iraq's independence. These tensions have persisted into the modern era, culminating in events such as the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the rise of ISIS.
    - **Syria**:
        - Sectarian divisions in Syria, exacerbated by French policies of favoring minorities such as the Alawites, contributed to the country's civil war, which began in 2011. The conflict has become one of the most devastating and complex in modern history, involving multiple factions and foreign interventions.
- **Influence on the Arab-Israeli Conflict**:
    - The creation of Palestine as a separate entity under British control, coupled with the conflicting promises made to both Arabs and Jews, sowed the seeds for the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Balfour Declaration, issued shortly after Sykes-Picot, further complicated matters by supporting the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, leading to tensions between Jewish immigrants and the Arab population.
    - The Arab-Israeli conflict has become one of the most enduring and polarizing issues in the Middle East, with its roots partly traceable to the territorial arrangements and betrayals of the Sykes-Picot era.

The legacy of division and conflict created by Sykes-Picot has not only destabilized individual states but has also contributed to broader regional instability, making the Middle East a focal point of global geopolitical struggles.

4.3. Weak National Identities

The artificial nature of the states created by Sykes-Picot undermined the development of strong national identities, leaving many Middle Eastern countries reliant on external powers and struggling to establish cohesive political systems.

- **Reliance on Colonial Powers for Governance**:
    - The lack of internal cohesion in states like Iraq and Syria often led to reliance on colonial powers for governance and security. This reliance was reinforced by the imposition of colonial mandates by the League of Nations, which formalized British and French control over the region.
    - In Iraq, for example, the British installed Sunni Arab elites in positions of power, fostering resentment among the Shi'a majority and the Kurds. Similarly, in Syria, French policies of favoring minority groups like the Alawites created long-term imbalances that undermined efforts to build a unified state.
- **Struggles to Establish Unified Political Systems**:
    - After gaining independence, many Middle Eastern states faced significant challenges in creating stable political systems. The lack of a shared national identity, combined with the divisions created by colonial policies, often resulted in authoritarian regimes or military dictatorships.
    - In Iraq, political instability and coups were frequent, culminating in the rise of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. In Syria, the Ba'ath Party also came to power, with the Alawite-dominated Assad family maintaining a grip on the country through repression and patronage.

- The absence of inclusive governance structures has made many Middle Eastern states vulnerable to internal and external pressures, as well as to the rise of extremist movements that exploit sectarian and ethnic divisions.

The weak national identities and fragmented political systems created by Sykes-Picot have left a legacy of instability that continues to shape the Middle East's political and social dynamics.

Conclusion

The Sykes-Picot Agreement's disregard for the ethnic, tribal, and religious complexities of the Middle East had profound and lasting consequences. By creating arbitrary borders, the agreement fragmented the region into states plagued by internal divisions, weak national identities, and recurrent conflict. Its legacy can be seen in the sectarian tensions and civil wars of Iraq and Syria, the enduring Arab-Israeli conflict, and the broader regional instability that has made the Middle East a global hotspot for intervention and strife. Understanding these impacts is essential to addressing the root causes of the region's challenges and crafting more effective policies for its future.

5. The Divide-and-Conquer Debate

The Sykes-Picot Agreement has often been scrutinized through the lens of "divide and conquer," a strategy historically employed by colonial powers to maintain control over territories by fostering divisions among local populations. While the explicit goal of the agreement was to secure British and French spheres of influence rather than to actively divide the region, the resulting borders and subsequent governance strategies effectively created fragmented and unstable states. These outcomes bear striking resemblance to the divide-and-conquer approach, raising questions about whether the fragmentation was a deliberate tactic or an unintended consequence of imperial ambition.

5.1. Was "Divide and Conquer" an Explicit Goal?

The primary objective of the Sykes-Picot Agreement was to carve out zones of influence for Britain and France in the post-Ottoman Middle East, ensuring their geopolitical and economic dominance. This ambition was rooted in securing resources, trade routes, and strategic positions rather than in fostering unity or stability. However, the agreement's implementation created conditions that mirrored divide-and-conquer strategies:

- **Fragmentation of Ethnic and Religious Groups**:
    - By drawing arbitrary borders, the agreement divided cohesive ethnic and religious groups, such as the Kurds, who were split across Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran, leaving them without a state.
    - Simultaneously, the agreement lumped together disparate groups with conflicting interests, such as Sunni and Shi'a Arabs in Iraq, creating internal divisions that required strong external control.
- **Colonial Powers' Dependence on Minority Groups**:
    - In several cases, Britain and France relied on minority groups to govern, a tactic that undermined majority populations and ensured continued dependence on colonial authorities. This approach deepened mistrust and enmity between communities, leading to long-term instability.

While divide-and-conquer may not have been explicitly stated as a goal, the outcomes suggest that fostering division often served the colonial powers' interests by making local resistance more difficult and ensuring the need for continued intervention.

5.2. Case Studies: Colonial Policies in Iraq and Syria

The aftermath of the Sykes-Picot Agreement highlights how British and French policies in their respective mandates leveraged divisions to maintain control, often favoring minority groups or specific elites over the majority populations.

- **British Policies in Iraq**:
    - After gaining control of Iraq, Britain installed Sunni Arab elites in key political and military positions, despite the fact that the majority of Iraq's population was Shi'a Arab.
    - This decision reflected Britain's preference for the Sunni elite, whom they viewed as more aligned with British interests and capable of governing effectively. However, this alienated the Shi'a majority and the Kurdish population in the north, fostering resentment and unrest.
    - Britain's divide-and-conquer approach in Iraq became evident in their handling of uprisings. During the 1920 revolt against British rule, the lack of unity among Iraq's Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurdish communities made it easier for Britain to suppress the rebellion.
- **French Policies in Syria**:
    - France implemented a classic divide-and-rule strategy in Syria by favoring the Alawite minority, a sect of Shia Islam, over the Sunni majority. The French recruited heavily from the Alawite community for the military, creating a disproportionately Alawite officer corps.
    - Additionally, France divided Syria into smaller administrative regions, such as the State of Greater Lebanon, the Alawite State, and the Druze State. This fragmentation weakened the development of a unified Syrian identity and fostered divisions among the population.
    - The legacy of French favoritism toward the Alawites is evident in modern Syria, where the Alawite-dominated Assad regime has faced ongoing conflict with the Sunni majority.

These case studies demonstrate how the policies enacted under the Sykes-Picot Agreement mirrored divide-and-conquer tactics, whether intentionally or as a byproduct of imperial governance.

5.3. Comparison with Other Colonial Border-Drawing Practices

The Sykes-Picot Agreement is not an isolated case of colonial powers drawing borders in a way that fostered division and instability. Similar practices can be observed in other parts of the world, particularly in Africa:

- **Africa's Arbitrary Borders**:
    - During the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, European powers divided Africa into colonies with little regard for the continent's ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity. This resulted in the creation of states with deeply divided populations, such as Nigeria (divided between Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the north and Christian Igbo and Yoruba in the south).
    - The borders also split cohesive groups, such as the Somali people, who were divided between Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia, fueling cross-border conflicts and irredentist movements.
- **Common Colonial Tactics**:
    - In both Africa and the Middle East, colonial powers often relied on minority groups to govern, creating power imbalances that led to resentment and instability. For example, Belgium favored the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority in Rwanda, a policy that contributed to the Rwandan Genocide.
    - The artificial nature of colonial borders and governance systems created states that struggled to develop cohesive national identities, making them vulnerable to conflict and external interference.

The parallels between the Middle East and Africa highlight how the division and fragmentation inherent in colonial border-drawing practices served to entrench colonial dominance while creating long-term instability.

5.4. Implications of Divide-and-Conquer

The outcomes of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and similar colonial practices demonstrate the effectiveness of divide-and-conquer strategies in the short term

for maintaining control. However, the long-term consequences have been overwhelmingly negative:

- Fragmented societies with deep-seated divisions.
- Weak state structures prone to authoritarianism and conflict.
- Enduring mistrust of external powers and their motives.

These legacies underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing the root causes of division in post-colonial states. Whether the fragmentation of the Middle East under Sykes-Picot was a deliberate strategy or an unintended consequence of imperial ambition, its effects continue to shape the region's geopolitics and conflicts.

Conclusion

While it is unclear whether divide-and-conquer was an explicit goal of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, its outcomes bear the hallmarks of this colonial strategy. The favoring of minority groups, the imposition of arbitrary borders, and the reliance on fragmentation to maintain control reflect a broader pattern of imperial governance seen across the colonial world. By examining case studies from Iraq and Syria and drawing comparisons with Africa, it becomes evident that the Sykes-Picot Agreement set the stage for many of the divisions and conflicts that continue to plague the Middle East today. Understanding this legacy is critical to addressing the challenges of unity and governance in the region.

6. Modern Repercussions

The Sykes-Picot Agreement's legacy continues to profoundly influence contemporary Middle Eastern geopolitics. The artificial borders imposed by the agreement have exacerbated divisions within states, fueled nationalist and Islamist movements, and led to persistent calls for redrawing borders to better reflect the region's ethnic and religious realities. The agreement's role as a symbol of colonial betrayal remains central to the narratives of many movements and conflicts in the Middle East today.

6.1. Relevance of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in Contemporary Geopolitics

- **Enduring Symbol of Colonialism**:
    - For many in the Middle East, Sykes-Picot represents the epitome of Western interference and betrayal. Its arbitrary divisions are frequently cited as the root cause of the region's ongoing instability.
    - Modern geopolitical tensions, such as disputes over borders, control of resources, and sectarian strife, often trace their origins to the borders drawn by Sykes-Picot.
- **Persistent Instability in Post-Colonial States**:
    - The states created by Sykes-Picot—such as Iraq and Syria—have struggled to maintain stability due to their diverse populations and weak national identities.
    - The agreement’s legacy can be seen in the frequent fragmentation of authority in these states, making them vulnerable to civil wars, insurgencies, and foreign interventions.
- **Geopolitical Fault Lines**:
    - The Sykes-Picot borders continue to shape contemporary conflicts. For instance, disputes over Kurdish independence, territorial claims in northern Syria, and the status of Palestine are all deeply influenced by the legacy of these borders.

6.2. Rise of Nationalist and Islamist Movements

- **Nationalist Movements**:
    - Many Arab nationalist movements, such as those led by Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and the Ba’ath Party in Iraq and Syria, emerged in response to the colonial legacies of Sykes-Picot.

    - These movements sought to unite Arab nations and reject Western-imposed borders, calling for pan-Arabism as a way to overcome the fragmentation caused by colonialism.

- **Islamist Movements**:
    - Islamist movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and later groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, have also invoked the Sykes-Picot Agreement as a symbol of the West's subjugation of the Islamic world.
    - These groups argue that the division of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of secular, Western-backed states undermined the unity of the Muslim community (Ummah).
- **Rhetoric of Betrayal**:
    - Islamist groups frequently use the Sykes-Picot Agreement in their propaganda, portraying it as evidence of the need to dismantle the modern state system and establish a caliphate that transcends national borders.

6.3. Emergence of Groups Like ISIS

The rise of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in the 2010s represented one of the most direct challenges to the borders established by the Sykes-Picot Agreement:

- **Challenging Colonial Borders**:
    - ISIS explicitly rejected the legitimacy of the Sykes-Picot borders, claiming to erase them by creating a transnational caliphate. Its propaganda frequently highlighted the agreement as a symbol of Western domination and betrayal.
    - In its territorial expansions, ISIS deliberately targeted border regions, such as the Syria-Iraq border, symbolically undermining the divisions created by Sykes-Picot.

- **Exploitation of Sectarian Divisions**:
    - ISIS capitalized on the sectarian tensions exacerbated by the Sykes-Picot Agreement, particularly in Iraq and Syria. By positioning itself as the protector of Sunni Muslims, ISIS attracted recruits from marginalized Sunni communities who felt disenfranchised by the Shi'a-dominated governments in Baghdad and Damascus.
- **Collapse of State Structures**:
    - The weakness of states like Iraq and Syria, rooted in the artificial nature of their borders and governance systems, created a power vacuum that allowed ISIS to thrive. The group's rapid territorial gains underscored the fragility of the modern Middle Eastern state system.

6.4. Calls for Redrawing Borders or Creating New Political Entities

The artificial borders established by Sykes-Picot have prompted ongoing debates about the need to redraw them to better reflect the region's ethnic and religious realities. These debates have gained renewed urgency in the wake of recent conflicts and upheavals.

- **Kurdistan**:
    - The Kurdish people, divided among Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran by the Sykes-Picot borders, have long sought independence or greater autonomy. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeastern Syria have emerged as strong proponents of Kurdish self-determination.
    - Calls for an independent Kurdistan have intensified following the Kurdish role in combating ISIS and their governance of semi-autonomous regions. However, these efforts face resistance from regional powers like Turkey and Iran, who fear losing territory.
- **Reassessment of Iraq and Syria**:
    - The prolonged conflicts in Iraq and Syria have led some analysts to suggest partitioning these states into smaller entities based on

sectarian or ethnic lines. Proposals include creating separate Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish states in Iraq or dividing Syria into Alawite, Sunni, and Kurdish regions.

  - While such proposals aim to address the underlying divisions created by Sykes-Picot, they also risk perpetuating fragmentation and instability.

- **Broader Regional Movements**:
  - The Arab Spring uprisings of 2010–2011 reignited discussions about the legitimacy of Middle Eastern borders and governments. Protesters and activists across the region called for reforms that challenge the state structures inherited from colonialism.

Conclusion

The modern repercussions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement underscore its enduring influence on Middle Eastern geopolitics. The agreement's artificial borders and colonial legacies have fueled nationalist and Islamist movements, facilitated the rise of extremist groups like ISIS, and prompted ongoing calls for redrawing borders to reflect the region's realities. As the Middle East continues to grapple with instability and conflict, the legacy of Sykes-Picot remains a central factor in understanding the region's challenges and potential paths forward.

7. The Wolfowitz Doctrine: A Modern Sykes-Picot?

The Wolfowitz Doctrine, formulated in the early 1990s, represents a pivotal shift in U.S. foreign policy following the Cold War. Named after its principal architect, Paul Wolfowitz, this doctrine sought to establish and maintain U.S. unipolar dominance in a post-Soviet world. The policy emphasized preemptive action to deter the rise of potential rivals and sought to reshape global politics—particularly in the Middle East—in alignment with American strategic interests. In its goals and execution, the Wolfowitz Doctrine shares striking similarities with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, particularly in its disregard for the complexities of ethnic, tribal, and religious dynamics in the Middle East. Both strategies

prioritized external dominance over regional stability, with long-lasting consequences.

7.1. Overview of the Wolfowitz Doctrine

The Wolfowitz Doctrine was articulated in a leaked draft of the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance document, authored primarily by Paul Wolfowitz and his team. Although revised due to public backlash, its core principles continued to shape U.S. foreign policy under subsequent administrations, especially during the George W. Bush presidency. The doctrine's key tenets included:

- **Maintaining Unipolar Dominance**:
    - The doctrine emphasized preventing the emergence of any rival superpower that could challenge U.S. hegemony.
    - The Middle East, with its vast oil resources and strategic importance, was identified as a key region for maintaining global dominance.
- **Preemptive Intervention**:
    - The doctrine advocated for preemptive military action to neutralize perceived threats before they could materialize.
    - This policy laid the groundwork for the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, which was justified on the (later disproven) premise of preempting the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).
- **Reshaping the Middle East**:
    - The doctrine viewed the Middle East as a region that needed to be transformed politically and militarily to align with U.S. interests.
    - This vision was encapsulated in the infamous "Seven Countries in Five Years" strategy, attributed to General Wesley Clark, which outlined plans to destabilize and change regimes in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran.

7.2. Goals of Destabilizing and Reshaping Middle Eastern Regimes

The Wolfowitz Doctrine prioritized the destabilization of regimes deemed hostile to U.S. interests, with the goal of replacing them with governments that would be more compliant with American geopolitical objectives. This strategy had far-reaching consequences:

- **Economic and Strategic Goals**:
    - The Middle East's energy resources, particularly oil, were central to U.S. interests. Controlling the region's energy supply would reinforce U.S. economic dominance and weaken potential rivals like China and Russia.
    - The doctrine also sought to ensure U.S. access to critical trade routes and maintain military footholds in strategic locations.
- **Transforming Political Structures**:
    - Regime change was seen as a tool for fostering liberal democracies in the region, an ideal often articulated by neoconservatives. However, this goal was frequently undermined by the complexities of local dynamics and the unintended consequences of intervention.

7.3. The "Seven Countries in Five Years" Strategy

The "Seven Countries in Five Years" strategy, reportedly part of U.S. foreign policy discussions in the early 2000s, outlined an ambitious plan to destabilize and reshape the Middle East. The countries targeted—**Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran**—were chosen for their perceived opposition to U.S. interests and their potential to disrupt regional stability. The strategy bore significant similarities to the Sykes-Picot Agreement in its top-down approach to reshaping the region without considering local complexities:

- **Iraq**:
    - The 2003 invasion of Iraq was justified as part of the broader war on terror and the effort to preempt WMD development. The removal of Saddam Hussein's regime, however, created a power vacuum that

exacerbated sectarian tensions and allowed groups like ISIS to emerge.

- **Syria**:
    - U.S. involvement in the Syrian civil war, including support for opposition groups, was part of the broader effort to destabilize and weaken the Assad regime, which was closely aligned with Iran and Russia. This intervention mirrored the Sykes-Picot-era disregard for Syria's internal ethnic and sectarian divisions, further fueling conflict.
- **Libya**:
    - The 2011 NATO-led intervention in Libya, aimed at ousting Muammar Gaddafi, resulted in the collapse of the Libyan state and plunged the country into prolonged civil war. Like in Iraq, the lack of a post-intervention plan underscored the perils of prioritizing regime change over stability.
- **Other Targeted States**:
    - Countries like Somalia, Sudan, and Lebanon faced varying degrees of U.S. intervention, often through indirect means such as supporting proxy forces or imposing economic sanctions. These efforts further destabilized already fragile states.

7.4. Parallels with Sykes-Picot

The Wolfowitz Doctrine shares several key characteristics with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, particularly in its disregard for the complexities of local dynamics and its prioritization of external interests over regional stability:

- **Disregard for Ethnic, Tribal, and Religious Complexities**:
    - Like the borders drawn by Sykes-Picot, the Wolfowitz Doctrine ignored the deeply rooted ethnic and sectarian divisions within the Middle East. For example:

        - In Iraq, the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime without a clear plan for inclusive governance exacerbated Sunni-Shi'a tensions and Kurdish separatism.
        - In Libya, the removal of Gaddafi left a fractured state with competing tribal militias and regional factions.

- **Top-Down Reshaping of the Region**:
    - Both Sykes-Picot and the Wolfowitz Doctrine sought to impose external visions of order on the Middle East, often with little regard for the aspirations of its people.
    - The failure to consult or engage local populations in meaningful ways resulted in policies that were viewed as illegitimate and fueled anti-Western sentiment.
- **Long-Term Instability**:
    - The borders drawn under Sykes-Picot created fragile states with weak national identities. Similarly, the regime changes pursued under the Wolfowitz Doctrine often replaced authoritarian regimes with chaos, leaving states vulnerable to civil wars, insurgencies, and the rise of extremist groups.

7.5. The Role of Regime Change in Perpetuating Instability

The emphasis on regime change as a cornerstone of the Wolfowitz Doctrine has had profound destabilizing effects on the Middle East:

- **Iraq**:
    - The U.S. invasion of Iraq removed a brutal dictator but failed to account for the complexities of governing a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian society. The dismantling of state institutions, such as the Iraqi military, created a vacuum that allowed insurgencies and extremist groups like ISIS to flourish.

- **Libya**:
    - The collapse of the Libyan state following Gaddafi's removal turned the country into a hub for human trafficking, arms smuggling, and extremist activity, destabilizing the broader North African region.
- **Syria**:
    - The U.S. and allied support for opposition groups in Syria contributed to the fragmentation of the state and prolonged the civil war, creating one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century.

Conclusion

The Wolfowitz Doctrine, like the Sykes-Picot Agreement, reflects a pattern of external powers attempting to reshape the Middle East to suit their strategic interests. Both strategies prioritized dominance and control over the complexities of local dynamics, resulting in fragmentation, instability, and resentment. While the Wolfowitz Doctrine aimed to secure U.S. unipolar dominance, its reliance on regime change and destabilization has left a legacy of conflict that continues to undermine the region's stability. Understanding these parallels is essential for crafting more responsible and effective policies in the Middle East.

8. Critiques and Counterarguments

The Sykes-Picot Agreement and its modern counterpart in spirit, the Wolfowitz Doctrine, have faced significant criticism for their long-term consequences on the Middle East. However, both also have defenders who argue for their necessity or pragmatism in their respective historical contexts. This section explores arguments defending Sykes-Picot as a wartime solution, counterarguments highlighting its destabilizing effects, and criticisms of the Wolfowitz Doctrine for perpetuating chaos and undermining sovereignty.

8.1. Arguments Defending Sykes-Picot as a Pragmatic Wartime Solution

Supporters of the Sykes-Picot Agreement argue that it was a necessary and practical response to the geopolitical realities of World War I. These arguments include:

- **Securing Allied Interests**:
    - The agreement aimed to preempt a potential power vacuum in the Middle East following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. By dividing the region into British and French zones of influence, the Allies sought to maintain stability and secure their strategic interests in the aftermath of the war.
    - For Britain, control over Mesopotamia (Iraq) ensured access to oil and protected vital trade routes to India. For France, influence in Syria and Lebanon aligned with its historical ties to the Levant and its colonial ambitions.
- **Preventing Inter-Allied Conflict**:
    - The secret nature of the agreement was intended to prevent disputes between Britain and France over territorial claims. By delineating spheres of influence in advance, Sykes-Picot avoided potential clashes between the Allies during a critical moment in the war.
- **A Response to the Ottoman Decline**:
    - The Ottoman Empire was already collapsing due to internal weaknesses and external pressures. The Allies viewed the partitioning of Ottoman territories as an inevitable process, and Sykes-Picot provided a framework for managing the transition.
- **Limited Alternatives**:
    - At the time, there were few viable alternatives to dividing the region among the victors. The idea of granting full independence to Arab territories may have been idealistic but was deemed impractical given the lack of unified leadership and the Allies' strategic priorities.

Proponents argue that, while imperfect, the Sykes-Picot Agreement reflected the political and military exigencies of its time and should be evaluated within that historical context.

8.2. Counterarguments Highlighting Its Long-Term Destabilizing Effects

Critics of the Sykes-Picot Agreement emphasize its profound and enduring negative consequences for the Middle East. These counterarguments focus on its disregard for local dynamics and its role in fostering instability:

- **Disregard for Ethnic and Religious Realities**:
    - By drawing arbitrary borders, the agreement ignored the complex ethnic, tribal, and religious fabric of the Middle East. Communities with shared identities were divided across borders, while historically distinct groups were forced into single political entities, creating the conditions for sectarian conflict.
    - For example, the division of Kurdish territories among Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran has left the Kurdish people stateless, fueling ongoing struggles for autonomy and independence.
- **Betrayal of Arab Aspirations**:
    - The agreement contradicted promises made to Arab leaders during the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, in which Britain pledged independence for Arab lands in exchange for their support against the Ottoman Empire. The revelation of Sykes-Picot undermined trust in Western powers and sowed resentment that persists to this day.
- **Weak National Identities**:
    - The artificial states created by Sykes-Picot lacked cohesive national identities, making them prone to authoritarianism, coups, and civil wars. Iraq and Syria, in particular, have struggled with internal divisions that have frequently erupted into violence.

- **Legacy of Colonialism**:
    - Sykes-Picot is often cited as a symbol of Western imperialism and its disregard for the sovereignty of non-European peoples. The agreement's imposition of foreign control over the Middle East laid the groundwork for decades of anti-Western sentiment and resistance movements.

Critics argue that the long-term costs of Sykes-Picot far outweigh any short-term benefits it may have provided during World War I.

8.3. Criticisms of the Wolfowitz Doctrine

The Wolfowitz Doctrine, often seen as a modern extension of the imperial mindset behind Sykes-Picot, has also been heavily criticized for its destabilizing effects on the Middle East. Key criticisms include:

- **Exacerbating Chaos**:
    - The doctrine's emphasis on regime change, exemplified by the invasions of Iraq and Libya, has frequently led to the collapse of state structures and the emergence of power vacuums. These vacuums have been exploited by extremist groups such as ISIS, fueling widespread violence and instability.
    - For example, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 dismantled the Iraqi government and military, creating conditions for a prolonged insurgency and sectarian conflict.
- **Disregard for Local Dynamics**:
    - Like Sykes-Picot, the Wolfowitz Doctrine failed to account for the ethnic, tribal, and religious complexities of the Middle East. The removal of regimes in Iraq, Libya, and Syria was not accompanied by adequate plans for post-conflict governance, leading to prolonged instability.

    - The doctrine's focus on imposing Western-style democracies often clashed with local traditions and political cultures, undermining its stated goals.

- **Undermining Sovereignty**:
    - The Wolfowitz Doctrine's emphasis on unilateral action and preemptive intervention has been criticized for violating the sovereignty of Middle Eastern states. Critics argue that this approach has delegitimized international norms and eroded trust in global governance institutions.
- **Strengthening Extremism**:
    - By destabilizing states and fueling resentment toward Western powers, the Wolfowitz Doctrine has inadvertently strengthened extremist movements. Groups like ISIS have used the narrative of foreign interference to recruit fighters and gain support among disenfranchised populations.
- **Failure to Achieve Long-Term Goals**:
    - While the Wolfowitz Doctrine sought to secure U.S. dominance and reshape the Middle East in alignment with American interests, it has often had the opposite effect. The interventions it inspired have led to prolonged conflicts, strained alliances, and diminished U.S. influence in the region.

Critics of the Wolfowitz Doctrine argue that its reliance on military force and disregard for regional complexities have perpetuated instability and undermined the very objectives it sought to achieve.

Conclusion

The Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Wolfowitz Doctrine, though separated by nearly a century, share a common flaw: a disregard for the complexities of the Middle East in favor of external strategic interests. While some argue that Sykes-Picot was a pragmatic wartime solution, its long-term consequences have been

overwhelmingly negative, creating a legacy of division and instability. Similarly, the Wolfowitz Doctrine, with its emphasis on regime change and unipolar dominance, has been criticized for exacerbating chaos and undermining sovereignty in the region. Together, these strategies highlight the dangers of external powers imposing their will on the Middle East without understanding or addressing its underlying dynamics. Recognizing these failures is essential for crafting more effective and responsible policies in the future.

9. Lessons from Sykes-Picot

The Sykes-Picot Agreement and its consequences offer critical lessons for contemporary geopolitics, particularly in the context of border creation, governance, and foreign interventions. The agreement's disregard for local identities and aspirations, coupled with its imposition of external control, highlights the pitfalls of prioritizing strategic interests over the complexities of societies. These lessons are increasingly relevant in a world grappling with the aftermath of colonialism, ongoing conflicts, and the challenges of fostering stable, inclusive governance in diverse regions.

9.1. Broader Implications of Drawing Borders or Engaging in Regime Change Without Consideration for Local Identities

One of the most enduring lessons from Sykes-Picot is the importance of acknowledging and respecting the cultural, ethnic, and religious dynamics of regions when drawing borders or implementing regime change.

- **Artificial Borders and Fragmentation**:
    - The arbitrary borders imposed by Sykes-Picot, drawn with little regard for local realities, resulted in fragmented states where ethnic and sectarian divisions often eclipsed national unity. Iraq, for instance, combined Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs, and Kurds into a single state, creating tensions that have persisted for decades.

- Similar issues have arisen in other regions where colonial powers imposed artificial borders, such as in Africa, where ethnic groups were divided across states, fueling inter- and intra-state conflicts.

- **Unintended Consequences of Regime Change**:
  - Just as Sykes-Picot ignored local governance structures and identities, modern interventions that prioritize regime change over stability have often exacerbated divisions and created power vacuums. The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, for example, dismantled the state's institutional framework, leading to sectarian violence and the rise of extremist groups like ISIS.
  - These examples illustrate that imposing external solutions without understanding local contexts can lead to prolonged instability and conflict.

- **Lesson**: Borders and interventions must be informed by a deep understanding of local identities, histories, and governance structures. Ignoring these factors risks creating fragile states and perpetuating cycles of violence.

9.2. The Need for Inclusive Governance in Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Societies

Another key lesson from Sykes-Picot is the necessity of fostering inclusive governance in diverse societies to build lasting stability and unity.

- **Challenges of Diversity in Sykes-Picot States**:
  - The states created by Sykes-Picot, such as Iraq and Syria, encompass a rich tapestry of ethnic, religious, and tribal communities. However, the governance systems imposed by colonial powers often excluded significant portions of the population, leading to marginalization and resentment.
  - For example, British rule in Iraq favored Sunni Arab elites, alienating the Shi'a majority and Kurdish minorities. Similarly, French policies in

Syria empowered the Alawite minority, creating long-term imbalances.

- **Modern Examples of Inclusive Governance**:
    - Successful examples of inclusive governance demonstrate the importance of power-sharing arrangements and equitable representation. Lebanon's confessional system, while imperfect, attempts to balance power among its Christian, Sunni, and Shi'a communities. Similarly, the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq has achieved relative stability through a degree of autonomy.
- **Lesson**: Multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies require governance systems that recognize and respect diversity. Inclusive policies and institutions are essential for fostering national unity and preventing the marginalization that often leads to conflict.

9.3. The Importance of International Diplomacy and Restraint in Avoiding Similar Mistakes

The legacy of Sykes-Picot underscores the need for international actors to approach interventions and border-making with diplomacy, restraint, and a commitment to long-term stability.

- **Failures of Unilateral Decision-Making**:
    - Sykes-Picot was negotiated in secret by two colonial powers, with no input from the people whose futures were being decided. This lack of consultation bred mistrust and resentment, undermining the legitimacy of the resulting states.
    - Modern unilateral interventions, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq or NATO's intervention in Libya, have similarly failed to account for the voices and needs of local populations, leading to instability.
- **The Role of Multilateral Diplomacy**:
    - Successful conflict resolution and state-building efforts often involve broad international cooperation and input from local stakeholders.

For example, the post-apartheid transition in South Africa was supported by multilateral efforts to ensure a peaceful and inclusive process.

  - The United Nations and other international organizations can play crucial roles in facilitating dialogue, providing oversight, and ensuring that interventions align with the principles of sovereignty and self-determination.

- **Lesson**: International actors must prioritize diplomacy, multilateralism, and the inclusion of local voices in decision-making processes. This approach fosters legitimacy and increases the likelihood of sustainable outcomes.

Conclusion

The lessons of Sykes-Picot are a cautionary tale for policymakers and international actors. The agreement's failure to consider local identities and dynamics has had far-reaching consequences, underscoring the importance of inclusive governance, thoughtful border creation, and restrained, collaborative approaches to intervention. In an era of globalization and shifting power dynamics, these lessons are more relevant than ever. By learning from the mistakes of the past, the international community can work toward a future where stability and unity are prioritized over short-term strategic gains.

10. Epilogue: From Sykes-Picot to the Wolfowitz Plan

The Middle East has long been a region of global interest, shaped by the strategic ambitions of powerful states. From the colonial impositions of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 to the post-Cold War strategies outlined in the Wolfowitz Doctrine, external powers have sought to reshape the region to suit their interests, often at the expense of its people. These two historical milestones, separated by nearly a century, share striking similarities in their approach and consequences. Together, they highlight the dangers of prioritizing external dominance over local stability, creating a compounded legacy of division, conflict, and instability that continues to affect the Middle East today.

10.1. Reflection on the Legacy of Sykes-Picot

The Sykes-Picot Agreement laid the groundwork for much of the Middle East's modern turmoil by dividing the region into arbitrary states that ignored its rich ethnic, religious, and tribal diversity. These borders created artificial nations, often grouping historically antagonistic communities within the same boundaries or splitting cohesive populations across multiple states. The consequences included:

- **Weak State Foundations**:
    - The lack of congruence between the imposed borders and local identities resulted in fragile states where loyalty to tribe, sect, or ethnicity frequently overshadowed national allegiance.
    - This fragility left many Middle Eastern states vulnerable to internal divisions and external manipulation.
- **Erosion of Trust in Foreign Powers**:
    - The betrayal felt by Arab leaders, who had been promised independence during World War I in exchange for their support, sowed deep mistrust toward Western powers. This sentiment persists in the region's political discourse, often framing foreign intervention as a continuation of colonial exploitation.

By prioritizing imperial interests over the aspirations of local populations, the Sykes-Picot Agreement created a framework that would be exploited and exacerbated by future geopolitical strategies.

10.2. Parallels Between Colonial Ambitions and Modern Geopolitics

The Wolfowitz Doctrine, formulated in the early 1990s, echoes many of the colonial ambitions embodied in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. While the doctrine operated within a post-colonial and ostensibly independent Middle East, its underlying approach shared key similarities with its predecessor:

- **Reshaping the Region to Serve External Powers' Interests**:
    - Sykes-Picot divided the Ottoman Empire's territories to secure British and French spheres of influence, prioritizing resources, trade routes, and geopolitical dominance.
    - The Wolfowitz Doctrine aimed to maintain U.S. unipolar dominance in a post-Cold War world by destabilizing and reshaping regimes deemed hostile to American interests, particularly those in resource-rich or strategically important areas like Iraq and Libya.
- **Ignoring Local Agency and Identity**:
    - Both strategies disregarded the voices and needs of local populations, treating the Middle East as a chessboard for great power competition.
    - Sykes-Picot's arbitrary borders ignored the complexities of ethnic and religious identities, while the Wolfowitz Doctrine's regime change policies often failed to account for the political and social realities of the states it targeted.
- **Creating Fragile States**:
    - Sykes-Picot's artificial borders created states prone to internal divisions. Similarly, the Wolfowitz Doctrine's interventions dismantled existing state structures without providing viable alternatives, leading to prolonged instability and conflict.

10.3. The Compounded Legacy

The interplay between the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Wolfowitz Doctrine has created a compounded legacy of instability in the Middle East:

- **A Tinderbox of Divisions**:
    - The arbitrary borders drawn by Sykes-Picot turned the Middle East into a region fraught with ethnic, sectarian, and tribal tensions. These divisions were further exacerbated by post-colonial policies that favored certain groups over others, creating deep-seated grievances.

    - By the time of the Wolfowitz Doctrine, these tensions had become entrenched, providing fertile ground for extremist groups, insurgencies, and civil wars.

- **The Spark of Modern Interventions**:
    - The regime changes pursued under the Wolfowitz Doctrine acted as a catalyst for the instability seeded by Sykes-Picot. In Iraq, the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime without a plan for inclusive governance intensified Sunni-Shi'a tensions, leading to the rise of ISIS. In Libya, the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi plunged the country into chaos, with competing factions vying for power.

Together, the decisions made under Sykes-Picot and the Wolfowitz Doctrine have perpetuated cycles of violence and division, leaving the Middle East as one of the most volatile regions in the world.

10.4. Final Thoughts on the Enduring Consequences

The enduring impact of Sykes-Picot and the Wolfowitz Doctrine underscores the dangers of external powers imposing their will on complex regions without regard for local dynamics. These actions have left a legacy of mistrust, weakened states, and recurrent conflict, with profound humanitarian and geopolitical consequences. Moving forward, it is imperative to learn from these mistakes and adopt a more ethical and responsible approach to international relations.

- **Lessons for Future Policies**:
    - Stability must take precedence over short-term strategic gains. This requires a focus on inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and the empowerment of local communities.
    - Sovereignty and self-determination should be respected as fundamental principles. Interventions, if necessary, must be multilateral, transparent, and guided by the needs and aspirations of the affected populations.

- **The Role of International Collaboration**:
    - Global institutions, such as the United Nations, must play a central role in facilitating dialogue and ensuring accountability for interventions.
    - Greater emphasis should be placed on preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution, addressing root causes of instability rather than relying on reactive or militaristic approaches.

The story of Sykes-Picot and the Wolfowitz Doctrine serves as a stark reminder of the costs of prioritizing power over people. By reflecting on these historical precedents, policymakers can work toward a future where international relations are guided by principles of stability, justice, and respect for human dignity.

11. Conclusion

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and its modern counterpart in spirit, the Wolfowitz Doctrine, illustrate the profound consequences of imposing external ambitions on the Middle East without regard for local complexities. These strategies, driven by geopolitical and economic motivations, have shaped the region's political, social, and economic trajectories in ways that continue to reverberate today. The enduring instability, conflict, and mistrust in the Middle East are testaments to the shortsightedness of policies that prioritize dominance over understanding and inclusion.

11.1. Recap of the Agreement's Motivations, Outcomes, and Consequences

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was a product of World War I, driven by the desire of Britain and France to secure their imperial interests in the eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The agreement divided the Middle East into spheres of influence, ensuring control over resources, trade routes, and strategic positions. However, its outcomes were far-reaching and deeply problematic:

- **Motivations**:
    - Britain and France sought to preemptively secure their geopolitical interests in the Middle East, viewing the region's resources and strategic location as critical to their post-war dominance.
    - The agreement was also intended to prevent inter-Allied conflict by delineating clear zones of control.
- **Outcomes**:
    - The arbitrary borders drawn under Sykes-Picot ignored the ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity of the region, creating fragmented states with weak foundations.
    - The agreement betrayed promises made to Arab leaders during the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, undermining trust in Western powers.
- **Consequences**:
    - The artificial states created by Sykes-Picot, such as Iraq and Syria, have been plagued by internal divisions, sectarian tensions, and recurrent conflicts.
    - The agreement's disregard for local identities and aspirations has left a legacy of mistrust and resistance toward foreign intervention, shaping the region's modern political landscape.

11.2. Reflection on the Enduring Legacy of Colonialism and Modern Interventionism

The Sykes-Picot Agreement is emblematic of the broader legacy of colonialism in the Middle East, a legacy marked by exploitation, division, and the imposition of foreign control. This colonial mindset has persisted in modern interventionist policies, such as the Wolfowitz Doctrine, which similarly sought to reshape the region to serve external interests.

- **Colonialism's Shadow**:
    - The Middle East remains haunted by the artificial borders and fragmented states created during the colonial era. These divisions have made the region a hotbed for conflict, with disputes over territory, resources, and identity driving much of its instability.
    - The sense of betrayal and exploitation fostered by colonialism continues to influence the region's relationship with Western powers, fueling narratives of resistance and anti-imperialism.
- **Modern Parallels**:
    - The Wolfowitz Doctrine, with its emphasis on regime change and preemptive intervention, echoes the top-down approach of colonial powers. Like Sykes-Picot, it disregarded the complexities of the region, resulting in destabilized states and power vacuums that have perpetuated cycles of violence.
    - The compounded legacy of colonialism and modern interventionism has left the Middle East in a state of perpetual turmoil, undermining its potential for stability and growth.

11.3. Final Call for Rethinking Geopolitical Strategies

The lessons of Sykes-Picot and the Wolfowitz Doctrine are clear: external powers must abandon strategies that prioritize dominance over stability and inclusion. Instead, future geopolitical approaches must be guided by principles of respect for sovereignty, local agency, and long-term stability.

- **Avoiding Historical Mistakes**:
    - Policymakers must recognize the limits of imposed solutions and the dangers of ignoring local identities and aspirations. The failure to account for the ethnic, religious, and cultural dynamics of the Middle East has repeatedly led to unintended consequences, from sectarian violence to the rise of extremist groups.

    - Interventions, if deemed necessary, must be multilateral and rooted in genuine efforts to address the root causes of instability, such as inequality, lack of governance, and resource disputes.

- **Prioritizing Stability and Sovereignty**:
    - Stability must take precedence over short-term strategic gains. This means fostering inclusive governance structures that respect the region's diversity and empowering local communities to take ownership of their futures.
    - Sovereignty and self-determination should be central to any engagement with the Middle East. External powers must move away from unilateral actions and instead support initiatives that are led by the region's own leaders and populations.
- **Toward an Ethical Approach to Geopolitics**:
    - The future of the Middle East depends on rethinking the principles that underpin international relations. This includes prioritizing human dignity, justice, and collaboration over exploitation and domination.
    - By learning from the mistakes of the past, the international community has an opportunity to build a more equitable and stable world order, one that respects the agency and aspirations of all nations.

Conclusion

The Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Wolfowitz Doctrine are cautionary tales of what happens when external powers impose their will on complex and diverse regions. Their shared legacy of division, mistrust, and instability underscores the urgent need for a new approach to geopolitics—one that prioritizes understanding, inclusion, and respect for sovereignty. The Middle East's path forward requires a commitment to learning from history and embracing policies that empower its people to define their own futures. By doing so, the international community can begin to address the deep-seated challenges of the region and work toward a more just and stable global order.

12. References

To provide a thorough and credible foundation for the discussion of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Wolfowitz Doctrine, this section includes references to primary sources, scholarly analyses, and contemporary commentaries.

12.1. Primary Sources

- **The Sykes-Picot Agreement Text (1916)**:
    - Officially titled the **Asia Minor Agreement**, the full text of the Sykes-Picot Agreement can be found in archives and online repositories of historical documents, such as the Avalon Project at Yale University: Sykes-Picot Agreement Text.
    - The document outlines the division of Ottoman territories into British and French spheres of influence and includes maps depicting the proposed borders.
- **Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (1915–1916)**:
    - This series of letters between Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, and Sharif Hussein of Mecca details Britain's promises of Arab independence in exchange for support against the Ottoman Empire. The letters can be accessed via historical archives like the University of Cambridge Digital Library.
- **Balfour Declaration (1917)**:
    - The British government's pledge to establish a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine is a critical document that intersects with Sykes-Picot's implications. The original text is available at the British National Archives: Balfour Declaration Text.

12.2. Scholarly Works on the History and Legacy of the Sykes-Picot Agreement

- **Fromkin, David. *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*. Holt Paperbacks, 2001.**
    - This comprehensive history of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire examines the motivations and consequences of Sykes-Picot, providing a detailed analysis of its legacy.
- **Kedourie, Elie. *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth: The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and Its Interpretations, 1914–1939*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.**
    - Kedourie's work focuses on the conflicting promises made during World War I and how these shaped the modern Middle East, with a specific focus on Sykes-Picot and its fallout.
- **Fisk, Robert. *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*. Harper Perennial, 2005.**
    - Robert Fisk offers a journalistic perspective on the Middle East's history, including a critical examination of colonial interventions like Sykes-Picot and their impact on the region.

12.3. Contemporary Analyses of the Wolfowitz Doctrine and U.S. Interventions

- **Defense Planning Guidance (1992)**:
    - The draft document outlining the Wolfowitz Doctrine was leaked to the *New York Times* in 1992 and can be found in their archives. It emphasizes the maintenance of U.S. unipolar dominance and preemptive intervention: NYT Archive Link.
- **Clark, Wesley. *Winning Modern Wars: Iraq, Terrorism, and the American Empire*. PublicAffairs, 2004.**
    - General Wesley Clark provides firsthand insight into the "Seven Countries in Five Years" strategy and critiques the implementation of policies inspired by the Wolfowitz Doctrine.

- **Chomsky, Noam. *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*. Metropolitan Books, 2003.**
    - Chomsky critiques U.S. foreign policy, including the Wolfowitz Doctrine, as a continuation of imperialist ambitions that destabilize the Middle East.
- **Gordon, Philip H., and James Dobbins. *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*. RAND Corporation, 2003.**
    - This RAND report evaluates the successes and failures of U.S.-led nation-building efforts, with specific reference to Iraq and the broader Middle East interventions.
- **Packer, George. *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.**
    - Packer examines the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, highlighting the unintended consequences of the Wolfowitz Doctrine's emphasis on regime change.

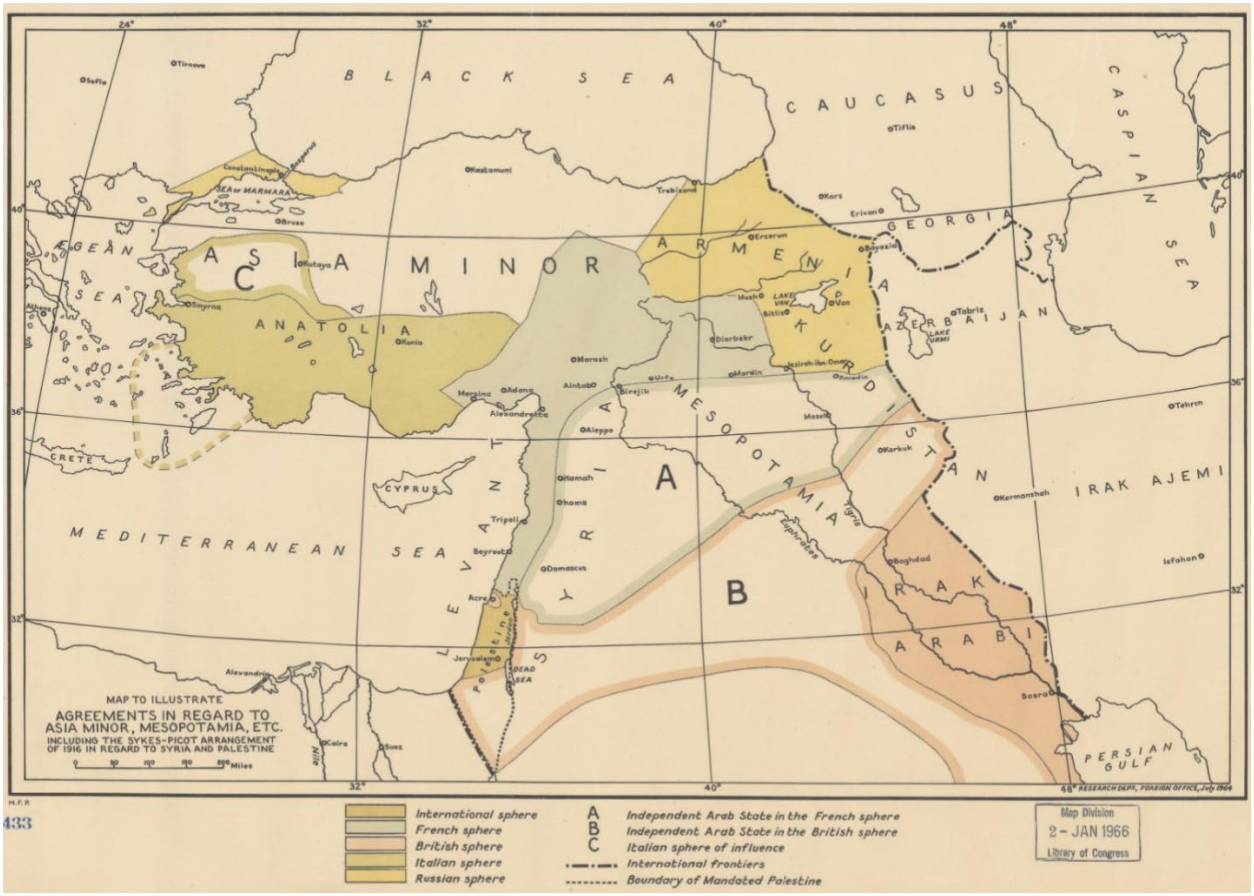
12.4. Reports and Articles

- **UNESCO Report on the Impact of Colonial Borders in Africa and the Middle East (2010)**:
    - This report explores the long-term effects of colonial-era border-making, with parallels drawn to the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Accessible through UNESCO's online database: UNESCO Archive.
- **"How the Sykes-Picot Agreement Helped Shape the Modern Middle East" — BBC History Extra (2016)**:
    - This article provides a concise overview of the agreement's context and consequences, making it accessible for general readers: BBC History Extra.

- **"The Wolfowitz Doctrine and Its Impact on U.S. Foreign Policy" — *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (2003)**:
    - A critical analysis of the doctrine's principles and its application in the Middle East. Available at: Foreign Affairs Archive.

12.5. Maps and Visual Aids

- **Original Sykes-Picot Maps**:
    - Historical maps delineating the proposed divisions under Sykes-Picot are available through the British Library and the National Archives.
- **Modern Conflict Maps**:
    - Comparative maps showing the impact of Sykes-Picot on modern conflicts can be accessed through the Council on Foreign Relations interactive resources: CFR Interactive Maps.



Map to illustrate agreements in regard to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, etc. : including the Sykes-Picot arrangement of 1916 in regard to Syria and Palestine

https://www.loc.gov/item/2014587996/